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THE WASHINGTON TIMES INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT REAGAN. President Reagan met in the Oval Office with Washington Times editors Woody West, Wesley Pruden, Smith Hempstone and Josette Sheeran.

November 27, 1984 The Oval Office

ENCLOSURE

Q: Mr. President, Congress has prohibited support for the Contra forces fighting against the government of Nicaragua. How can you live with this restriction, and doesn't it send a message to the world that it might be risky to be a friend of the United States, as it was when President Carter was here?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, this is — this is one of the things that I think the Congress, up until now, has been shortsighted and, in fact, irresponsible with regard to that situation down there. And we are hopeful that — we know that there was a kind of consensus of feeling just recently among them, when they believed, as we all did, that possibly that ship was bearing high-performance planes, MiGs to Nicaragua. We don't know for sure that it wasn't. We can't prove that it was, we can't prove that it wasn't, because of some maneuverings that went on.

But there are six more Russian ships, as nearly as we can count, that are on their way to Nicaragua now with more arms. I think that maybe, if they remember that feeling that they had with regard to the possibility of high-performance planes, that they will see that there is value in our carrying on.

What we have are revolutionaries that only a short time ago they and the Sandinistas were all on the same side, fighting the same revolution. And fighting it ostensibly, and by their own claim, for democratic processes. Now they got in and, a la Cuba under Castro, the one faction took over, has created a totalitarian Marxist state, and the others are still in the revolution, still trying for the democratic principles that they'd fought for in the beginning.

And I think that the — and the very fact that the Sandinista element is continuing to support revolutionaries who are trying to overthrow a duly elected government, this is of itself of great interest to us.

Q: Sir, have you drawn a line that says if there are high-performance aircraft introduced into this theater, that there will be a reaction from us that —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we have let them and we have let the Soviet Union know that this is something we cannot sit back and just take, if they do that, because that is so obviously, then, a threat to the area. That's not — well, their whole military today isn't defensive. Their whole military is greater than all the combined countries of Central America put together, and it's so obviously offensive in nature that we can't ignore that.

And that would be just the crowning thing to have those high-performance planes representing a threat to the area and to the hemisphere. We've made it plain that we're not going to sit by quietly and accept that.

Q: Do you think, sir, that the MiG crate episode and the six ships that are believed on their way now is in any way an attempt by the Soviet Union to test your resolve on this issue?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know whether it is or not. I know they —

Q: Sort of like the missile — Kennedy's Cuban crisis?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Yes, I know they do things like that and — so we're keeping watch on what's there. We're not going to raise Cain over a purely domestic-type cargo, or anything of that kind, but we are in contact with the Soviet Union.

Q: Do you know if weapons, or MiGs specifically, are on any of those six ships you mentioned?

THE PRESIDENT: No. We do know that in several of the ports where those ships have touched down there has been evidence of those aircraft and crates that could contain them. And we want to know that after the ships leave those aircraft are still there.

ENCLOSURE